1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

701 ## 2. The Military Camp and its Significance in Amhara Social Structure.

The preceding section on land tenure contained a number of references to the traditional military organization and function among the Amhara. This was inevitable, for the traditional army, particularly the military camp, constituted one of the most significant pillars of Amhara social structure. Even now, when [554] Amhara children cannot see it any more, the military camp lives on as "normal social organization" in the minds of the middle-aged, and in the titles of nobility still being bestowed several times a year by the emperor.

For, as recently as 1929, it flourished in full flower, e.g. at the headquarters of the provincial dynastic head of Gojjam, Ras Haylu, and, somewhat less flagrantly, at the provincial court of the lord of Gondar (Begemdir Province), Ras Kassa.

701 ### A. The Structure and Function of the Military Camp.

● 703 The number of individuals directly involved in the totality of the pattern of the military camp was never fixed. On the contrary, the quantity involved was extremely fluid, there was much joining and deserting, and no commander ever seemed to be able to force any but his closest retainers to remain against their will. Historians believe that the army even of

701 as great a military figure as Emperor Menelik II was
703 close to falling apart at the time of his great victory over the invading Italians in 1896. The Amhara resists discipline except for short-lived adulation of a military hero who inspires him; he comes to fight, not to wait; even today, in the modern army, Ethiopian officers characterize the Amhara soldier as fearless, brave, but unwilling to take orders and having a tendency to act as an individual in battle. He is characterized as almost opposite from the patient Galla soldier who takes orders and cooperates smoothly with his military outfit, but rarely takes initiative.

[578] Regional clannishness, easily stirred by news from the home district, was another motive that could cause large segments of a traditional Amhara army to vanish almost overnight. A third development that would whittle away an army gradually was the almost inevitable outcome of having been stationed in one vicinity too long. In this case, the countryside was soon stripped bare by the military foragers, the "gabbar" was suffering famine himself, as if a vast cloud of locusts
[727] had nibbled away every leaf ("gonäqhchäfä"). A fourth motive, related to the first, might be loss of confidence in the strength and wisdom of their chief, in which case the soldiers not wanting to return home without glory took to the woods and became bandits ("shefta"). The latter were a major problem after every war. Even a biberal statesman like Ras Imru, as governor of Gondar after the liberation of the country in World War II, found harsh measures the only remedy.

5: Bruce T-5 (1768-1773) 1804
MP5 Amhara MP5

317 one ounce to ten of gold, which gives it a very pale colour.

703 N. B. This observation is sufficiently confirmed by the colour of those links that still remain of the honorary gold chain conferred on Mr Bruce by the king of Abyssinia. These links are of a paler hue than a common guinea, rather coarsely made, and unpolished. Gold chains, called in Habbesh sunsulé, are a mark of dignity bestowed by the sovereign on the most meritorious persons in his army. It is usual to give a splendid suit of clothes at the same time, an Egyptian and Persian custom; vide Genesis, xli. 42. and Esther, viii. 15.

651 Wechne, in Belessen, is about 34 or 35 miles, a long day's journey from Emfras. There is paid, to maintain the royal family on the mountain, 250 ounces gold, and 730 cloths (this means webs of cotton cloth, called shuma). This is an old establishment. None are permitted to go up but the women carrying water. There was formerly a cistern, but it is now in ruins, and useless. There are near 300 persons there; and all the exiles are allowed to marry. Bacuffa escaped by help of his sister.

793 Extreme unction is unknown in Abyssinia; that is, the
792 anointing with oil. However, when a person is attacked with sickness, which threatens death, he often puts on a monk's hood, as a token that in case of recovery, he will abandon the world, and then receives the last sacrament, or rather he does so before putting it on; and it is generally the custom to distribute all his moveables to the churches, which the priests appropriate. These are traces of extreme unction. The great men ofen renounce the hood, and return to their former life.

792 N. B. The Abyssinian MS. histories are full of these instances, in which the great men, when disappointed in politics, retire to Waldubba, or other deserts, to live as monks. The distribution of goods and money made by the kings, when sick, to the churches, occurs in almost every reign. Before Yasous II. died, the Chronicle says, that he had given away every thing he had, in this way, except the crown on his head. When Joas was proclaimed, the Iteghe his grandmother wished to give a present to the poor, as usual at the begin-

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

structured. But the marching and fighting unit seems to have been, for all practical purposes, the individual soldier and his retainers. Battles were not fought in a disciplined manner; the outcome depended on the sheer numbers of troops, their state of morale, and the chance of catching the enemy off guard. Except for the large-scale deployment of troops in accord with the customary tactic of envelopment, there was little expectation of subordinating the impulses of individual soldiers to the needs of a "team"; for the prevailing military ethic stressed rather the heroism of the individual soldier and his drive to bring back a maximum of booty and trophies.[25]

The independent status of the common soldier in mass levies was based on the fact that he was primarily a peasant and thus expected to return to his fields as soon as a particular campaign was over. Nor were members of the more permanent armies of lords greatly constrained. Loyalty to one's lord was in many cases a lasting tie, and accounts for much of the stability that existed in such arrangements. But in general it appears to have been a factor of far less moment than was the case, for example, in feudal Japan. The Amhara soldier felt he was fighting for a lord by his own free will and, therefore, had every right to leave him when conditions justified a move. One such condition was when the lord did not reward his followers liberally enough. Another related condition was when the lord had a tendency to suffer defeat in battle. Indeed, it was not uncommon for soldiers to swarm from one side to the other during a battle when defeat for their side seemed imminent. Still another basis for deserting one's chief was the ambition of a vassal to acquire greater power, in which case he might rebel—become a *shĭftā*, in the original sense of the word—and build up a military force of his own in the hope either of impressing his erstwhile master sufficiently to be reinstated with greater honors, or of taking his place by vanquishing him in combat, or simply of carrying on as a free agent.

The civilian counterpart of the soldier's right of desertion or rebellion was the right of judicial appeal which belonged to every free Amhara. This pertained primarily to the area of property rights. A man who suffered some grievous injustice in a local court had the right of appeal, in theory at least and often in practice, to higher courts at the provincial and imperial level. There was, in addition, some possibility of relief from an inordinately oppressive governor. He might be removed accidentally by the emperor, in the continuous process of *shum-shĭr;* the people under his jurisdiction might secure his deposition through appeals to the emperor or his overlord; or they might take arms behind one of his rebellious subordinates and overthrow him by force. Traditional Amhara society thus provided significant areas of social freedom for its citizens despite the feudal obligations that lay heavy upon them.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

*121 Amhara religious experience. The favorite written literature consists of
156 those genres which glorify individual saints for their special powers and
776 great deeds. The *gadel* depicts the heroic struggles of saints against tempta-
*121 tions and persecutions; the *tämher* relates their miraculous feats; and the
156 *malka*, a verse form of some fifty five-line stanzas, consists of a rhapsodic
538 description of the physical features and moral qualities of some saintly sub-
776 ject. The various *qenē* stanza types, moreover, serve largely to glorify indi-
viduals through the exotic use of religious symbolism—especially the nine-
line *mawaddas*, which means "praise."

*121 While these literary genres are accessible only to the learned few, the
156 multitude also adores individual saints. Each of the saints has his particular
776 following in the population, his popularity varying according to region
and to the powers for which he is famed. This idolization has been directed
*121 not only to angels and legendary figures from the past, but also, to a lesser
156 extent, to contemporaneous religious virtuosi and outstanding masters of
554 the religious books.

*121 Perhaps more prominent in Amhara life has been the glorification of brave
156 men. The Abyssinian military ethic took the form of a cult of the hero. Per-
703 sonal bravery—not discipline, training, honor, or self-sacrificing loyalty—
[554] was the paramount virtue in Abyssinian warfare. The *guabaz* warrior was
rewarded by his chief, praised by the minstrel, and esteemed by the populace.
His bravery was ranked according to the fearfulness of the enemy vanquished.
Thus, in Menelik's day the fanciest headdress was given to a noble who killed
one of the fierce Danakil, a less fancy headdress being awarded the killer of
the tough Raya Galla. Such actions constituted the one area in which per-
[521] sonal boasting was permitted and, in fact, institutionalized in the genre
known as *fukarā*.

We are indebted to Arnauld d'Abbadie for a firsthand account of the effect of this cult of the individual hero on the orientation of the Abyssinian warrior, in a passage so rare it is worth citing at length:

> The type of combat which [the Ethiopian] prefers over all others—because it gives him the most freedom to expand his personality—is that where, due to insufficiency of terrain or other circumstances, the chiefs can engage only a part of their forces. He loves to watch the skirmishers of the two armies spy out and accost one another while declaiming their martial themes. Joyously he throws off his toga to clad himself in some military ornament . . . and to mix himself in the widely spaced lines which follow one another and rise to the attack. He loves to comprehend the rationale of the manouvers of the two parties, to be able to judge the blows, to know under which hand the victims fall, to choose from among the enemy to avenge their death, to adapt his movements to the instincts which animate his companions, and to feel the earth tremble under the charges of cavalry which come as a squall

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

> to change suddenly the whole configuration of battle. He loves to hear, amidst the crackle of rifle-fire, the huzzahs, the shouts, the challenges, the injuries, the encouragements, the allocutions, the piercing voice of the troubadours, and the rhythms of the flutes alternating with the lugubrious wailing of the trumpets; to know, finally, that on the hills, behind their drummers who beat out the charge in place, the two rival chiefs and the two armies are following him with their eyes, and that he may at one moment or another, return to his lord and, hurling before him some trophy, tell him, at the end of his war chant: "There! This is what I know how to do!"[36]

A cult of the individual obtains, in addition, with respect to the man with a genius for outsmarting others. Men who have beguiled their foes with particular cleverness, in litigation or in political intrigues, are scarcely less celebrated than religious virtuosi or heroic warriors. Anecdotes about great feats of shrewdness are the beloved stuff of Abyssinian folk history and are twice told around the fireplace.*[37] Some lords have enjoyed great reputations simply for being such successful and gifted scoundrels.

Cleverness in words counts as much, if not more, than clever deeds. Here we confront once more the phenomenon of wax and gold, but appearing in this context as a sort of finesse in personal relations. It is a question here of individuals made memorable because of their memorable lines, their talent for swiftly and surely employing the ambiguities of Amharic to satirize, at the right moment, some personality, or social type, or aspect of the human condition. Military or political events are often remembered more for the witty verse composed by some personage on the occasion than for their historical significance. In the present century, Naggādrās Tassamā Eshatē has been one of the most outstanding personalities of this sort, as was Alaqā Gabra Hānnā in the nineteenth century.

INDIVIDUALISM AND MODERNITY

The Traditional Pattern

Our inquiry thus far has involved analysis of the various ways in which self-orientation is and is not manifest among the Amhara, in lieu of the more simplistic question of whether Amhara society is individualistic or not. Building on this analysis, we may now attempt a more integrated interpretation of traditional Amhara society.

The predominant tendency in human relations among the Amhara is a disposition to seek, not unity based on affection, understanding, and/or responsi-

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*A recent study which analyzed 1,086 stories with identifiable themes, told or written by Ethiopian children in grades two through eight, revealed that "cleverness pays" was by far the most frequently recurring theme.